

Ken Leiser, The St. Louis Post Dispatch

ST. LOUIS — Rusting steel gates and deteriorating flood walls and levees are all that stand in the way of future Mississippi River flooding near downtown St. Louis.

But repairs to the roughly 11-mile flood-protection system remain on hold, and more than \$5 million that St. Louis voters set aside for the project in November 2005 could be diverted elsewhere if federal funding doesn't materialize soon, Mayor Francis Slay warned Monday at a riverfront news conference.

Internal Revenue Service rules require the city to spend the 2005 bond measure proceeds within three years, Slay said. That money was billed as the local share of the \$15.6 million flood-protection project.

Slay wants a massive water projects bill pending in Congress amended to allow the city to begin spending its local share before the Army Corps of Engineers' portion is budgeted. The city will press Congress to fund the St. Louis flood wall repairs in the 2008 construction cycle.

Advertisement

"This is about protecting thousands of lives, protecting billions of dollars of property, and also taking a pre-emptive approach," Slay said.

U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-St. Louis, appeared with Slay and cited a "typical bureaucratic rule" that prevents the corps from taking up new projects, including the flood wall.

"We need to get immediate action," Carnahan told reporters.

Otis Williams, executive director of the St. Louis Development Corp., said the existing flood

walls and levees should withstand a normal flood, but sections could breach during a catastrophic event. The system of walls and levees protect mostly commercial land north of downtown and residential tracts to the south.

A July 2005 report by the Corps of Engineers and the city found more than half of the 33 metal gates in the flood wall were "severely degraded." The report recommended replacing gates in 20 locations and sealing off those that aren't used anymore.

The report also called for replacing more than 100 relief wells that maintain the integrity of the flood wall or levees by carrying away built up water.

© Copyright 2007, The St. Louis Post Dispatch